

EARLY JOBS AND
POSITIONS HELD

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ADULT - NEW SALEM

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Abraham Lincoln Before 1860

Jobs in New Salem, Illinois

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

LINCOLN LORE

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Dr. Louis A. Warren - - - Editor

1832-1932

The one hundredth anniversary of an event is an important epoch in the calendar of a historian. Since 1909, the celebration of the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, there has been little occasion for observing the anniversary occurrences of other incidents which happened in the life of the growing boy.

Two local celebrations; one at Rockport, Indiana, recalling Lincoln's river trip to New Orleans in 1828, and another at Vincennes, Indiana, commemorating the migration of the Lincoln family from Indiana to Kentucky in 1830, seem to have been the only events of sufficient importance to justify centennial observances.

The scene of Lincoln's activities now shifts to Illinois and during the next thirty years or more many communities will have the opportunity of emphasizing important episodes associated with the life of Abraham Lincoln one hundred years ago.

The year 1832, especially, was rich in Lincoln pageantry. After having lived for twenty-three years in obscurity "The Tall Sycamore of the Sangamon," makes his first appeal for public recognition and attracts the attention of the leading citizens of the state of Illinois.

The anniversary celebrations of this year should offer a very helpful atmosphere for the beginning of a stupendous task which some day must be accomplished—the publication of a complete and exhaustive documentary history of Abraham Lincoln. Inasmuch as the personal correspondence of President Lincoln will not be available to historians for about twenty years, according to the specifications in the bequest of Robert Lincoln, its completion could not be anticipated before that time. Not less than thirty volumes would be required for the development of the argument, and it should contain the findings of those who are recognized authorities on different periods in Lincoln's life and on different aspects of his character.

As an incentive for the undertaking of such a task by Lincoln students Lincoln Lore plans to feature this year the colorful events which occurred in the life of Abraham Lincoln during 1832. It appears that there are six definite objectives around which sub-

ject matter should be gathered if we are to arrive at a proper understanding of Lincoln's qualifications and ambitions at the very beginning of his public career. They are presented briefly in the following paragraphs.

D. Offutt's Clerk

A river trip which Abraham Lincoln made to New Orleans in the summer of 1831 paved the way for the position of clerk at New Salem, Illinois, in the store of the man for whom he operated the flatboat. During the first three months of the year 1832 we find Lincoln in Offutt's store. An order was signed by him on March 8, 1832, as an agent for D. Offutt. At this time as he puts it in his own words, "Offutt's business was failing—had almost failed—when the Black Hawk War broke out."

The Embryo Politician

The day before he signed the order for Offutt he set his signature to a more important writing, an announcement of his candidacy for the legislature and a copy of the platform on which he intended to run. This important paper, the first printed address extant by the president, bore the date of March 9, 1832. There is a tradition that he had made a public announcement of his intentions previous to this, but of this fact we are certain, that he was a grocery clerk and mill hand at the time he first aspired for political favor.

The Talisman's Pilot

Mr. V. A. Bogue, a friend of Abraham Lincoln's who sponsored the trip of the steamer, Talisman, from Cincinnati to Springfield, Illinois, in 1832 announced through the Springfield papers that he should be met at the mouth of the Sangamon River by several men under the direction of an experienced river man "to show the course of the stream." Abraham Lincoln happened to be the man who not only piloted the boat from the mouth of the Sangamon to the town of Springfield, reaching the town on the twenty-fourth day of March, 1832, but a week later saw the Talisman safely through the dam at New Salem on its way back to Beardstown.

Captain Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln had not been back from Beardstown many days after the eventful Talisman trip until a messenger came to New Salem and posted hand bills containing a proclamation by the Governor. It called for volunteers to put down the Black Hawk uprising. On April 21, Lincoln enrolled as a member of the voluntary force at Richland in Sangamon County. Here Lincoln was elected captain of the company. They moved on to Beardstown the next day, and in the course of their itinerary touched the following places: Mouth of Henderson River, Yellow Banks, Dixon, Ottawa, Galena, and White Water, then in Michigan

Territory. Near the latter place on July 10, the troops were mustered out. Lincoln's own company had been released at the mouth of Fox River on May 27, and he had re-enlisted, serving in Captain Elijah Iles's Company.

Lincoln Unhorsed

When Lincoln awoke the next morning after the troops had been mustered out he discovered that someone had stolen his horse. This necessitated his walking most of the way from what is now White Water, Wisconsin, to New Salem, Illinois. At Peoria he and his companions purchased a canoe and followed the river to Havana where they disposed of the craft and struck off on foot for New Salem. Lincoln could not have arrived in town less than ten days before the August election and possibly not more than a week intervened before this important event took place. As candidate for the legislature he could not reach many people in this short time and there are those who feel that the stolen horse, which delayed his return, was largely responsible for his losing race at the polls on August 6.

Merchant of New Salem

His political defeat was the beginning of a series of disasters which confronted him for the next several months. On October 30, he signed a note with Nelson Alley for over one hundred dollars. Alley defaulted and Lincoln was obliged to pay the note. He purchased a half interest in a store at New Salem and later acquired half interest in another business which he and his partner purchased. The Lincoln and Berry enterprises at the close of the year 1832 were in a condition not unlike the store for which Lincoln had clerked earlier in the year, and finally he was obliged to assume the obligation for this failure, which he called in later years the "National Debt."

The six episodes mentioned here which occurred during the year 1832 should furnish plenty of material for a series of interesting pageants which might be presented as centennial celebrations during the year 1932.

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Lincoln's Years at New Salem

Erin Fitzgerald

Anna-Jonesboro Community High School, Anna

In July 1831 Abraham Lincoln made New Salem, Illinois, his new home. After just a few weeks at his new home, Lincoln said, "I am a piece of floating driftwood, and I accidentally landed at New Salem." He may have been drifting, but his landing in New Salem was definitely no accident. In the six years Lincoln lived at New Salem, from July 1831 to April 1837, he became a mature man while building a secure base for his personal and social life and educating himself for his future.

Lincoln had moved from Indiana to New Salem, Illinois, at the end of 1831. Lincoln met a man by the name of Denton Offutt, who was impressed by Lincoln's work style. Offutt asked him to take a flatboat full of goods to New Orleans. Lincoln agreed, but returned to a job as a clerk in Offutt's New Salem general store. At the time this general store was one of three in New Salem.

When Lincoln began working at the store, no one knew him. He wanted to become well known by the local people. Lincoln soon took a temporary job counting election ballots. One afternoon, while counting ballots in the midst of the townspeople, Lincoln began telling stories of his days in Indiana. Laughing and enjoying these stories, the townspeople began to become acquainted with Lincoln. Offutt also helped bring out Lincoln's recognition by the townspeople. He went around bragging about Lincoln's strength. In fact Denton bet ten dollars with Bill Clary that a man named Jack Armstrong from Clary's Grove could not beat Lincoln in a wrestling match. Bill Clary's boys were the town bullies who intimidated the locals. Involved and ready for the fight, the townspeople bet on the best man. Lincoln picked up Armstrong and shaking him, defeated the six-foot-four-inch, two-hundred-fourteen-pound man. Now everyone in New Salem was an immediate friend of Abraham Lincoln.

While Lincoln lived at New Salem he was hired to pilot a flatboat to carry goods to New Orleans. This artist's rendering depicts Lincoln plying the waters of the Mississippi.



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Abraham Lincoln, a man hired to do many jobs, kept himself busy. In a town with no church, one tavern, two saloons, a post office, a ferry, and three general stores, Lincoln remained active. Initially Lincoln was Denton Offutt's clerk, but he was also hired by Dr. Nelson to pilot a flatboat to Beardstown. Aside from these two jobs, Offutt hired Lincoln to become head of the Rutledge and Camron Mill. Another man named William G. Greene was also hired to do the same job. Constantly working together, Abe and Greene developed a lifelong friendship. Earning only fifteen dollars a month, Lincoln slept in a room at the rear of Offutt's store. Eventually, the business began to fail, and Lincoln was left without a job.

Lincoln immediately enlisted in the army when the Black Hawk War began, only nine months after his arrival in New Salem. After serving one term, Lincoln was elected captain. After his ninety-day enlistment, Lincoln returned from the war and prepared for the election of the Illinois General Assembly. He ran as a Whig in a district with many Democrats. With only ten days to campaign, Lincoln spoke on several issues while at the podium. He did not speak much about national politics, but instead about the navigability of the Sangamon River. In the midst of one speech, a fight broke out in the crowd. Lincoln recognized one of the men as Rowan Herndon, a personal friend. Lincoln stepped down from the podium and defended his friend. He gained several people's attention, but it was not enough. Lincoln lost the election, but people in New Salem voted 277 to 3 in favor of him. After losing the election in 1832, Lincoln came back and won in 1834.

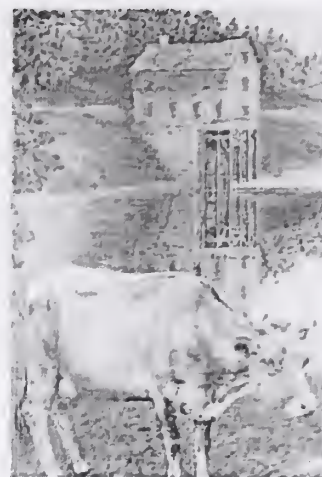
Out of a job, Lincoln went to work for general-store-owner Samuel Hill. Hill sold whiskey and was the town postmaster. However, the townspeople felt that Lincoln could be a better postmaster. At the time, Lincoln's ambition was growing. On May 7, 1833, Lincoln placed a five-hundred-dollar bond, and became postmaster. Abe was not paid much for splitting rails, helping at the mill, and being an assistant surveyor. In fact in the three years as postmaster, he was not paid more than two hundred dollars. In addition, Lincoln's mailing route was huge. Lincoln helped out people who could not afford to pay their mail bills. In one instance, Lincoln was turned in by a friend and fined ten dollars for delivering unpaid mail. On May 30, 1836, Lincoln resigned as postmaster.

Lincoln worked for a time at the Rutledge and Camron Mill, located on the banks of the Sangamon River at New Salem.

While at New Salem, Lincoln also advanced his education and furthered his personal life. Lincoln was among the few people who could read and write. Benjamin Thomas wrote, "Always endeavoring to improve his education, he studied books on grammar and acquired a lifelong taste for the poetry of English poet and playwright William Shakespeare and Scottish poet Robert Burns." Lincoln also joined the local debating society. In fact, a member at Lincoln's first debate stated, "A perceptible smile at once lit up the face of the audience, for all anticipated the relation of a humorous story." In addition, Lincoln met some women. He knew a woman named Ann Rutledge. Lincoln found himself grieving over her death in 1835. He believed that maybe Ann was meant for him. However, eighteen months later, Lincoln met Mary Owens, and proposed to her. Miss Owens rejected him.

After his hours as postmaster, Lincoln studied law with Mentor Graham, the local schoolmaster. After becoming educated, Lincoln reached a high point in his life. On September 9, 1836, he applied for his law license, receiving it six months later on March 1, 1837. Lincoln now wanted to journey into the law field. With old memories and new knowledge, Lincoln left New Salem on April 15, 1837, to practice law in Springfield.

Lincoln's years in New Salem contributed to much of his development as a political realist, logician, and lawyer. According to one historian, "there he began his political career and the study of law, the two forces that shaped his thinking and prose style." ♦ [From David D. Anderson, *Abraham Lincoln*; Paul Horgan, *Citizen of New Salem*; Richard Kigel, *The Frontier Years of Abe Lincoln*; Benjamin Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln*.]



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suade Bennett not to make mischief for the Republicans. He reported "his 'Satanic Majesty'" to be "too rich" and powerful to be influenced by promises of office, but he thought him susceptible to promises of "Social position"—invitations to "dinner or tea at the White house."

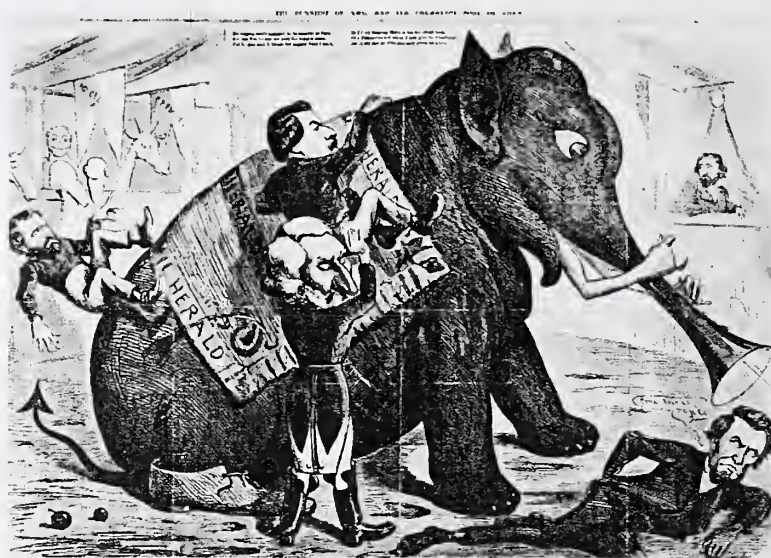
Bennett wrote to Lincoln occasionally during the war—significantly, almost always *in answer* to Lincoln's letters. Apologizing on September 28, 1861, for the denial of a pass to a *Herald* reporter, Lincoln promised Bennett "that the administration will not discriminate against the Herald, especially while it sustains us so generously, and the cause of the country so ably as it has been doing." In 1862 Bennett pledged his support for recruiting, for enlarging the army, and for operations in the field, but he was ominously silent about other administration policies. The *Herald* repeatedly attacked Lincoln's "nigger worshipping policy." Bennett got along rather well with Mrs. Lincoln, but his correspondence with the President was stiff and formal.

It is a myth that Lincoln "bought" the support of the *Herald* in 1864 by offering Bennett the Paris mission. The offer was made through intermediaries, and Bennett turned it down on March 6, 1865, because he was too old and felt that he could best improve America's relations with France through his newspaper. However, the *Herald* did not support Lincoln for the Presidency in 1864. It characterized Lincoln and his opponent George B. McClellan as "Two men of mediocre talent" and hoped almost to election day that the electoral college would choose Ulysses S. Grant for president.

SOURCES: Medill's letter to Lincoln about Bennett (June 19, 1860) is in the Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Bennett's course in 1864 is the subject of John J. Turner, Jr., and Michael D'Innocenzo's "The President and the Press: Lincoln, James Gordon Bennett and the Election of 1864," *Lincoln Herald*, LXXVI (Summer 1974), 63-69. They are doubtless correct that Lincoln never gained the *Herald's* support, but they ignore the value of the *Herald's* neutrality in the election. The best survey of Bennett's relationship with the administration is David Quentin Voigt's "'Too Pitchy to Touch'—President Lincoln and Editor Bennett," *The Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, VI (September 1950), 139-161.

Berry, William Franklin (1811-1835) Lincoln's business partner in New Salem. William F. Berry was the son of a minister. He had attended Illinois College in Jacksonville and was a corporal in Captain Lincoln's company in the Black Hawk War. When they returned from the campaign, Berry bought James Herndon's share of a store he owned with his brother J. Rowan Herndon. Lincoln soon purchased the brother's share, and Berry and Lincoln were partners.

Berry was as poor as Lincoln, and both bought the "old stock of goods, upon credit." The store was not a "grocery" (where liquor was sold by the drink), but it doubtless handled liquor in larger quantities as most such stores did. On March 6, 1833, Berry and Lincoln were issued a tavern license, but Berry alone signed the bond for the license. Early in 1833, with their pay from service in the Black Hawk War, the partners went deeper



In a cartoon which comes close to foreshadowing the symbol of the Republicans, the elephant, cartoonist Frank Bellew lampooned James Gordon Bennett, easily recognized by his crossed eyes, for his vacillating course in 1864. After dumping Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant, Bennett helps George B. McClellan mount the Herald elephant. This rare cartoon appeared in the New York humor magazine *Phun*.

into debt to buy the stock of Reuben Radford's store, recently vandalized by the Clary's Grove boys, from William G. ("Slicky Bill") Greene (who turned a quick profit in his sale to Lincoln and Berry).

Lincoln summarized the partners' experience succinctly: "they did nothing but get deeper and deeper in debt." Berry was reputedly a heavy drinker, and the partnership had disastrous consequences. In April 1833 Lincoln sold his share to Berry. The store, as Lincoln put it later in life, "winked out." Suits against the partners for failure to pay their debts resulted in judgments against Lincoln's personal property which took his horse and surveying instruments—returned to him by Greene and James Short after a sheriff's sale. Berry died in 1835, and the accumulated indebtedness of the partners, now entirely Lincoln's problem, amounted to a staggering \$1100. Lincoln called it the "national debt" and was repaying those debts well into the 1840s.

SOURCES: See Benjamin P. Thomas, *Lincoln's New Salem* (Springfield, Ill.: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1934), and Harry E. Pratt, *The Personal Finances of Abraham Lincoln* (Springfield, Ill.: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1943). Zarel C. Spears and Robert S. Barton's *Berry and Lincoln, Frontier Merchants: The Store that "Winked Out"* (New York: Stratford House, 1947) is a labored but interesting defense of Berry, which belittles the "national debt" as a myth.

Beveridge, Albert Jeremiah (1862-1927) Politician and Lincoln biographer. The son of a Union soldier, Albert J. Beveridge was born in Ohio, grew up in Illinois, and graduated from Asbury College (now DePauw) in Indiana. He became a lawyer in Indianapolis and in 1899 was elected to the Senate. He was a Republican noted for his advocacy of imperialism and reform, and by 1912



Albert Jeremiah Beveridge

it. Butler was an unreliable witness on other Lincoln stories (see LINCOLN PAPERS), and John Hay himself in 1904 said in a letter to New Hampshire politician William E. Chandler that the "letter of Mr. Lincoln to Mrs. Bixby is genuine."

The greatest student of the letter's history, Boston journalist F. Lauriston Bullard, concluded not only that Lincoln wrote it but also that the "beauty of the letter is not destroyed by the fact that its premises were wrong." A reading of one of the facsimiles certainly proves the wisdom of Bullard's statement.

SOURCES: F. Lauriston Bullard's *Abraham Lincoln & the Widow Bixby* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1946) is definitive and makes fascinating reading in the bargain.

Black Hawk War A conflict with Sac and Fox Indians led by Chief Black Hawk in 1832. The war provided Abraham Lincoln with his only military experience before becoming commander in chief in the bloodiest war in American history.

When news reached New Salem that the Illinois governor had called for troops to fight the Indians, Lincoln was a clerk in a failing store and an announced candidate for the state legislature. He quickly enrolled in a militia company (on April 21, 1832) and was "to his own surprise," as he recalled later, "elected captain of it." The election gave him "much satisfaction." In fact, he said in 1859 that it was "a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since." It also gave him his first experience as a leader of men—over 60 of them. The election proved to be a better index of his popularity than of his military ability. One soldier recalled that Captain Lincoln was twice arrested, once for disobeying an order not to discharge a firearm near the camp and again for being unable to get his men, drunk on liquor stolen from the officers' quarters, to march. After his 30 days' enlistment expired, Lincoln reenlisted three times for a total of 51 days. He later recalled that he "went the campaign, served near three months, met the ordinary hardships of such an expedition, but was in no battle." Mustered out at Black River, Wisconsin Territory, a day after someone stole his horse, Lincoln walked most of the way to Peoria, paddled a canoe to Havana, and walked from there to New Salem. He received \$125 and a land grant in Iowa Territory for his service.

In a speech in the United States House of Representatives on July 27, 1848, Lincoln belittled the extravagant claims made for the military heroism of Democratic presidential candidate Lewis Cass by recalling facetiously: "By the way, . . . did you know I am a military hero?" Lincoln made "charges upon the wild onions," had "a good many bloody struggles with the musketoes," but he never "saw any live, fighting indians."

In an autobiographical statement in 1860, Lincoln recalled that having returned from the military campaign, he ran for the legislature, "encouraged by his great popularity among his immediate neighbors." The statement is misleading, for Lincoln had announced his candidacy long before the call for troops and the encouraging elec-

The Kaiser was "gratified"



A letter
from the Kaiser

"His Majesty the Kaiser hears that you have sacrificed nine sons in defense of the Fatherland in the present war. His Majesty is immensely gratified at the fact, and in recognition is pleased to send you his photograph, with frame and autograph signature."

Fran Meter, who received the letter, has now joined the street beggars in Delmenhorst-Oldenburg, to get a living.



A letter
from Lincoln

DEAR MADAM—I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle. I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they have died to save. I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

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Paper is scarce. Don't destroy this hand-bill. Pass it on and help win the war.

tion as captain. In fact, his return from the campaign in July, near the August election day, prevented him from campaigning widely in the district and may have caused his defeat in the election.

SOURCES: See Benjamin P. Thomas, *Lincoln's New Salem* (Springfield, Ill.: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1934), and the interesting but less detailed account in Albert Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1928).

Blair, Francis Preston (1791-1876) Elder statesman and self-appointed adviser to the Lincoln administration. Blair was born in Virginia but spent most of his early career in journalism and politics in Kentucky. In 1830 President Andrew Jackson brought him to Washington

American propaganda in World War I exploited the power of Lincoln's written words by contrasting the humane sentiments of the Bixby letter with a letter of condolence by Kaiser Wilhelm.

